

Remarks to the Community in Santa Ana, California September 22, 1995

Thank you very much, Jason, for the introduction. I am delighted to be here with all the officers and members of the Boys and Girls Clubs; Mayor Pulido; to the president of the Police Officers Association, Don Blankenship. Ken Stevens, thank you for this wonderful gift on behalf of Taco Bell for the future of the United States of America. Aren't we proud of Taco Bell for doing this? Isn't it a great thing? I was glad to be standing there with—is it on now? Can you hear me? I was glad to be standing there receiving that check with Jason Reese and Karina Martinez and Shaquille O'Neal. And I thought, the young people make me feel so big, and he makes me feel so small. I can see the headlines tomorrow: "Shaq Visits Santa Ana; President Clinton Also Shows Up." [Laughter] I want to thank the police officers who are here, Chief Walters and Sergeant Follo, for what you said and all the students from the Santa Ana Unified School District high schools and the Pio Pico Elementary School and the Lowell Elementary School.

I am honored to be here, first and most importantly, to support this teen supreme alliance between the Boys and Girls Clubs and Taco Bell to fight youth violence and to give our young people a better start in life. And I really want to thank Shaquille O'Neal for getting on an airplane and coming all the way out here to be with us today and most importantly for wearing his magnificent talent and his great success in a humble and straightforward way that's a good role model for all the young people of this country and for the message he gave you today.

You know, when I was the Governor of Arkansas and Shaquille O'Neal was in college playing at LSU, our schools used to play all the time. And I woke up this morning thinking about a particular basketball game, and I thought, he's going to make me relive that game all over again. And right before we came out, I was in such a good humor. And he put his hand on my shoulder, and I looked at him; he said, "You remember the time we beat Arkansas' brains out and I scored 58 points?" [Laughter] And it was worth losing that game to see him giving the message to you today.

You listen to what Shaquille O'Neal said and you won't go wrong with your lives, and you'll have a good life. And that's really what we're all here about.

I want to say to all you young people, every day when I go to work as President I try to spend my time and make decisions thinking about your future. I try to think about what America will be like when you are out of high school, when you are grown, when you have children of your own here at the school where you are today. And I know that we need to do a lot of things in our country to give you a strong economy and the opportunity to make a good living. We desperately, all of us, owe you the opportunity to get a good education. And every young person in this country should be able to go to a good school and then should be able to go on to college, and money should not be an object. And I am working hard for that.

But one of the things that has burdened me the most—is it on again? There it is. One of the things that has burdened me the most is the knowledge that unless we can give our young people a safe and secure childhood free of crime and violence, a lot of people will never have the life they ought to have. And when I went to Washington 2½ years ago, I made a promise to myself that I would do everything I can to put more police on our streets, to get more guns and drugs off our streets, to give young people a chance to be in positive situations and out of gangs.

And what we are really here celebrating today is the kind of partnership that makes that possible, because the initiatives of the mayor and the Boys and Girls Clubs here, the initiatives of Taco Bell, the work of citizen leaders like Shaq, and the work of the police officers here all mean that you can have a safer and more secure future.

I did work hard to make sure these police officers behind me would be in this community and communities like it throughout the country. In the last year, under our crime bill, we have put out 25,000 more police officers in the United States of America to be on the streets protecting our children, preventing crime as well

as catching criminals. These people are now working your neighborhoods, patrolling by foot or bicycle, and some are even on electric carts. In some of the small towns in the more rural Western parts of our country, they ride horses. But—is it on again? Is it on now? Now? Well, some of you can hear, and the others should pretend to hear. [Laughter] Now is it on? Half of you are saying yes; half are saying no. Now? [Applause]

These police officers are trying to do something that's very important. They're trying not only to catch criminals, they're trying to prevent crime by being with people in the neighborhoods, in the schools, on the streets, where they live. After all, our objective ultimately is to prevent crime, to keep bad things from happening to our children and their parents. And that's what they represent.

I also think it's important that we try to do some other things to make people safer. That's why last year we banned 19 deadly assault weapons from our streets. We don't need Uzis in our schools and on our streets, threatening our children. That's why we passed the "three strikes and you're out" law, because after people commit three serious violent crimes, they shouldn't be back on the streets to terrorize our children and their future. That's why we passed the Brady law which requires people to be checked for their criminal backgrounds before they get a handgun. And last year, last year alone, over 40,000 people who had committed serious crimes were prevented from purchasing handguns. And a lot of little children are alive as a result of that.

What I want to say to all of you today real simply is that we can't do this alone. And we can't do it solely with law enforcement. We have to have people who are working with our kids, making the speech that Shaq made to you today, telling young people they can have a good life, telling them they have to do right and avoid doing the wrong thing, telling them they ought to be in good organizations and out of gangs that want to hurt people, where people define how important they are by how many people they can hurt and how tough they can be.

You know, one of the most troubling things to me today—and I want to say this especially to the high school students who are here—the mayor said something that was absolutely true, that the crime rate is going down here. Four or 5 years ago, most Americans didn't believe

we could drive the crime rate down. The crime rate is down in every State. The crime rate is down in almost every city. But arbitrary crime by teenagers is still going up. And I think it's because there are too many young people who haven't been given the opportunity to be part of a positive environment, where they can have something to say yes to as well as something to say no to, where they know they're going to have a good future, where they're told that they matter, where they're important to everybody and they know that they matter and they can have a good life and they can live out their dreams. Nothing, nothing that we do can take the place of what you can do here in this community to reach out and touch these young people one by one by one, to tell them that they matter, to tell them that they are a gift of God and they can become anything they are willing to work hard enough to be. That is your job, and I'm proud that you're doing it.

Now meanwhile, those of us in Washington have a job, and that is to keep doing what we know works. One of the most troubling things to me about the debate in Washington today is that Congress is actually considering abolishing the program that put these police officers behind me, cutting back on the funding and sending a check to the cities and basically saying, "You do what you want with this money." The last time this was tried, some local governments used the money to buy airplanes, accountants, and tanks. What we want to do is to keep putting people like these fine men and women in uniform, who are behind me. We need to have more of these police officers. We don't want more young people being shot. We want more people being saved.

So I say to you, I say to you, today the American people are more threatened by what can happen on their own streets than by some country going to war with us. If the United States Congress were going to reduce the national defense of this country to the point where you felt insecure and dangerous, people would be outraged. Well, let me tell you, the gangs of this country, the armed criminals of this country, the people who are willing to shoot people on the street for no other reason than they happen to be there, they represent a threat to the security of America. And it is wrong, wrong, wrong to turn away from our obligation to protect our children with these police officers.

If all of you here will keep doing your job, if you will keep the light in the eyes of these children, if you will convince teenagers in their most difficult years that there is a country that cares about them and there is a good future for them out there, and if we do our job in Washington to keep giving communities the tools they need to bring the crime rate down, we can make the American dream live for all these young people into the next century. And 20 or 30 years from now, they can be here making their speeches, looking at another generation of young people, proud and secure in the fact that they had the chance to live out their dreams.

We have to do something about gangs and violence. We have to do something about our children being given up too young, too easily. And we know what to do. We have to do what the Girls and Boys Clubs do. We have to do what this city is doing. We have to do what

Taco Bell is doing. And we've got to keep the United States Government on the side of our children, their future, and safety in the streets with this police program. Help us do that, and we'll try to help you.

God bless you all, and thank you for having me here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:18 a.m. at the Boys & Girls Club of Santa Ana. In his remarks, he referred to Jason Reese, Boys & Girls Clubs of America 1995 national youth of the year; Mayor Miguel Pulido of Santa Ana; Kenneth T. Stevens, vice chairman, Taco Bell Foundation and member, national board of governors, Boys & Girls Clubs of America; Karina Martinez, Boys & Girls Club of Santa Ana 1995 local youth of the year; Paul Walters, chief, and John Follo, sergeant, Santa Ana Police Department; and basketball player Shaquille O'Neal.

Remarks at the O'Farrell Community School in San Diego, California September 22, 1995

Thank you so much. Let's give Henry Walker another hand. Didn't he do a great job? [Applause] I sort of want him to keep on talking; I was having a good time. [Laughter]

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the warm welcome. Thank you, Congressman Filner. Thank you, Dr. Bertha Pendleton, for doing such a good job with this school district. Thank you, Dr. Bob Stein, the O'Farrell chief educational officer. I want to say a special word of thanks to a group of parents and teachers and students and others who help to make this school successful, who met with me for about a half an hour, before we came out here, to talk about what they were doing. I'd like to ask them to stand up and be recognized. Let's give them a hand. They gave me an education today. [Applause]

I want to say to all of you how grateful I am to this school and to all the other schools here present for believing in our children. I believe in zero tolerance, and I thank you for that. I'm trying to get every place in the country to adopt that policy. And most importantly, I believe in the high expectations that are given

to all children in this school, because all of your children can learn, and we should expect them to and help them to.

I want you to know why I came here today. You know, I like San Diego, and I came here to sign the Goals 2000 bill, and I like to be in a community that cares about education. But I wanted to come to this school today for a particular reason, and that is because O'Farrell is organized as a charter school. They call it a family. And as a school organized in this way, it's freed of a lot of the rules and regulations that keep some of our schools all across America from designing their own ways of educating children. They also are held accountable for results, and they do a good job.

I want the American people to see this because there are too many people in America that not only don't have high expectations of our students, they don't have high expectations of our schools anymore, and they don't understand how much good can be done in a good school when people are working together and they believe in their children and the promise of this future.